

Book Reviews

Barry Evans, *Helping Care for the Young: Rye Lane Chapel Sunday School, Peckham, London, 200th Anniversary 1822–2022* (Independent Publishing Network, 2021), 316 pages. ISBN: 9781800493506.

Reviewed by Brian Talbot

Revd Dr Brian R. Talbot is minister of Broughty Ferry Baptist Church, Dundee, and a Senior Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam.
briantalbot2008@gmail.com

The vital task of recording and retaining records of the life and witness of local churches is the essential groundwork of church history. It is extremely difficult to tell the broader story well without the detailed accounts of the impact of Christian congregations in local communities. There are many pamphlet histories of churches written to mark particular anniversaries in their faith journey, alongside a smaller number of detailed book-length studies of their work. However, it has also been noted that there are very few studies looking into the work of Christian churches amongst children and young people. This lacuna in the field of church history is beginning to be addressed on an academic level with a number of scholars producing good work in recent years. However, book-length studies of this aspect of the work of any local congregation are still extremely rare. Although there are a few older works that fall into this category, Barry Evans is to be congratulated for this recent publication relating to the work of a London Baptist Church. *Helping Care for the Young* is a study of the Sunday School of a local church, both in its mission halls and on its main premises. What is more, the author sets the detailed local study in the wider regional and national context in England. This enables readers to compare or contrast what was happening in Peckham with wider trends over these two centuries.

This study of a village cause two hundred years ago that changed into an expanding London middle-class suburb and now into an ethnically diverse community, records the way Rye Lane Chapel leaders and church members sought to live out their faith and engage effectively with their local community. In addition to being a good detailed

academic study, the author also seeks to write in an engaging manner for Christians today, helping them to reflect on their own situation and the importance of communicating and engaging effectively with constantly changing communities. He is also very open to admit the strengths and weaknesses of the choices made by this church over the years and on a few occasions to record the times when relationships broke down and some people left the church. In summary, it is a superb study of the work of a local church with children and young people. It is well written, and warmly commended. Hopefully, it will encourage other authors to engage in a similar project with their own congregations in the years to come.

Oleksandr Geychenko, *Brotherhood in Christ: Towards a Ukrainian Baptist Perspective on Associations of Churches* (Langham Academic, 2024), 374 pages. ISBN: 9781839737893.

Reviewed by Peter Penner

Dr Peter Penner is involved in the Eurasian Accrediting Association where he is responsible for Advanced studies. He has earned a DTh and Dr habil in Missiology and is a lecturer and researcher in missiology.

pfpenner@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8148-6601>

This book addresses the research question: ‘What is the Ukrainian Baptist understanding of the ecclesiological nature of associations of churches (ACs) as reflected in their practices, organisational structure, and key theological documents?’ (p. 13).

The book begins with a five-chapter historical account of Ukrainian Baptists, tracing the development of the Ukrainian Baptist Union (AUUCECB). Drawing on a range of historical literature and archival documents, Geychenko provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of Baptist ecclesiology in Ukraine, paying special attention to the concept of the association of churches (AC). This historical perspective is valuable for understanding the growing ecclesiological significance of ACs within the Baptist tradition in Ukraine.

Chapter six transitions to contemporary reflections, focusing on interviews with key Ukrainian Baptist leaders. Applying qualitative research methods, Geychenko integrates oral history into his analysis,

offering a contextual and up-to-date examination of the understanding and function of ACs in the Ukrainian Baptist context. These interviews add richness to the study by presenting voices that may not be well-represented in written sources but are nonetheless central to the ongoing life of the Ukrainian Baptist Union.

The core argument of the dissertation is that the AC serves as a vital ecclesiological and ecclesio-practical model for Ukrainian Baptists. Geychenko proposes that the AC should be understood not merely as an organisational necessity but as a theologically grounded entity. His engagement with Paul Fiddes' covenant ecclesiology, particularly in chapters seven and eight, strengthens this argument. Geychenko's dialogue with Fiddes helps to broaden the theological horizon of his study, proposing that the AC model can be theologically enriched through Fiddes' concepts of covenant relationships and community. This engagement allows the author to offer a robust theological foundation for the AC model, which can be applied within the Ukrainian Baptist context and beyond.

One of the book's strengths is its thorough exploration of historical theological issues. Over half of the book is devoted to tracing the development of Baptist ecclesiology from the early years of the movement to the present, offering a balanced perspective that incorporates primary sources from various periods. Geychenko's analysis highlights the hybrid origins of Ukrainian Baptist identity, shaped by both Western and Eastern influences, and transformed by the unique historical context of the Russian Empire.

Geychenko also provides a concise summary of Fiddes' covenant ecclesiology, which is particularly helpful for readers unfamiliar with his work. The interaction between Geychenko and Fiddes' ideas offers a model for others seeking to navigate the relationship between ecclesial traditions and denominational forms. In this way, Geychenko's dissertation contributes to broader conversations about ecclesiology within the Baptist tradition.

Overall, Geychenko's work is a significant contribution to the study of Baptist ecclesiology, particularly in the Ukrainian context. His historical analysis, theological engagement, and use of qualitative

research methods make the book relevant to both scholars and practitioners. It would be beneficial for this work to be translated into Eastern European languages, as it offers valuable insights for Baptists in post-Soviet contexts.

Miguel A. De La Torre, *The U. S. Immigration Crisis: Towards an Ethics of Place* (Cascade Books, 2016), 176 pages. ISBN: 9781498223690.

(Available to borrow online through Internet Archive <<https://archive.org/details/usimmigrationcri0000dela/mode/2up>> [accessed 7 July 2024])

Reviewed by Ksenija Magda

Dr Ksenija Magda is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Zagreb's Centre for Protestant Theology 'Matthias Flacius Illyricus'.

ksenija.magda@tfmvi.hr

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9824-063X>

With more than thirty books and other publications, Miguel De La Torre is no stranger to the academic world of North and South. This little book, published (it seems) as a reaction to the election rhetoric of 2016, provides a flip-side to Donald Trump's orotundity which demagogically scapegoated Latin American immigrants for all alleged economic misfortunes in the United States. History is back to haunt us, and so De La Torre's little book acts as an antidote. For its seven chapters the author sat in different places which witness to the truth about Northern injustice done to the American South. This is a truth which cannot be picked up from the distant safety of the living room television, as that never raises the actual question of 'why are Salvadorians, Hondurans, and Guatemalans coming to the United States? Why are tens of thousands of unaccompanied children from these countries showing up on our doorsteps?' (p. 65). The answer is simple: the US built roads into these areas to exploit their livelihoods by controlling their economies (p. 156). De La Torre points back to these old economic and political relationships by which the US has enforced on their poorer neighbours unjust pacts like the United Fruit Company and NAFTA and created problems in South America condescendingly called, for example, 'banana republics'. The starving now follow these same roads. This should remind especially the Christians that 'God chooses the oppressed of history [...] and makes them the cornerstone,

the principal means for salvation [...] If we want to see the face of Jesus all we need to do is to gaze into the face of the undocumented' (p. 157). Yet not our patronising 'hospitality' to the stranger is required, but a 'responsibility of restitution' (p. 159). This calls for a thorough transformation in Christian ethics. The book is therefore dedicated to the 'activists, churches and organizations, that occupy space on the borders between privilege and disposition, accompanying the disenfranchised'. It is written as a workbook and seeks to raise up those who want to ask actual questions about immigration and discuss the real Christian response.

De La Torre's book surprised me. I chose it for my interest in the spaciality of faith and its theories, but it gave me heart-wrenching case studies instead. I found it less concerned with theology and sometimes running right into doctrinal disputes without bothering to dwell on them (which may be held against him). But De La Torre's goals are too urgent (still) and cannot be concerned with 'armchair theology's' feeling. Rather, regardless of theology we are asked to dare to apply it as ethical Christian living in actual conflicted places of the undocumented immigrants. Then we must work up the courage to address these issues in the face of the unjust talk and policies of the world.

Enoh Šeba, *Sermon Listening: A New Approach Based on Congregational Studies and Rhetoric* (Langham Monographs, 2021), 300 pages. ISBN: 9781839732218.

Reviewed by David McMillan

Dr David J. McMillan is a Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam.
 mcmillan@ibts.eu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1303-0175>

Šeba is concerned in this book with the inconsistency between the purpose of preaching being to edify and encourage and the reality as expressed by one listener he quotes who said 'I feel actively insulted by the rubbish I get to hear' (p. 1). Šeba sets about providing a comprehensive exploration of the interplay, or lack of it, between preacher and listener. On the way he provides a very helpful discussion on rhetoric and homiletics. Having introduced key characters — Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Augustine — the author engages with

contemporary contributors on homiletics — Hogan, Reid, Myers, and Loscalzo. Among his conclusions from the survey of their work, he highlights that contemporary studies warn that persuasion has to be tempered with awareness of manipulation and exploitation, and ‘speaking must be preceded by listening’ (p. 55).

Šeba follows on with chapters exploring congregational studies, empirical studies in preaching, and a case study based on the experience of Croatian Baptists, before coming to theological and theoretical reflection and suggestions for improving the practice of preaching. The chapters on theological reflection and improving practice will be of interest and help to anyone interested in preaching, even if a case study on Croatian Baptists is not.

Taking a lead from the work of Elaine Graham and others who focus on theology as formation of character, building a community of faith, and relating to contemporary culture, Šeba develops his argument by addressing each focus in turn from the doctrinal perspective of *imago Dei*, incarnation, and the priesthood of all believers. His conclusions from this theological reflection are worthy of serious consideration. Consideration of the *imago Dei* demands that preaching respect the context and experience of the listener as one bearing the image of God and a co-contributor to the process. The preacher should see the incarnation as the model that demands engagement with the lives of people in a meaningful and authentic way if preaching is to be worthy of a hearing. Šeba concludes that ‘the congregational aspect of preaching is best disclosed when the concepts of passive and active responsibility are juxtaposed with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers’ (p. 232).

In the concluding section Šeba offers nine suggestions for those who wish to take seriously the task of preaching with sensitivity to the experience of listening. They are excellent and it is well worth getting your hands on this book to read, reflect upon, and digest. Listeners too are offered three helpful suggestions that will enable them to ‘take the initiative and transform the nature of the relationship between preacher and audience’ (p. 251).

While Šeba's work is rooted in the experience of Croatian Baptists, of which he is one, he has provided a comprehensive exploration of the interrelationship of preaching and listening that will be of great value in any context. There may be voices arguing that the practice of preaching is now not, if it ever has been, an effective means of communication and ministry. Šeba's work provides a positive vision and a practical guide that gives the lie to such negativity.

Andy McCullough, *Global Humility: Attitudes for Mission* (Malcolm Down Publishing, 2018), 248 pages. ISBN: 9781910786857.

Reviewed by Paul Fleming

Prof. Paul Fleming is a Steering Group Member of Irish Baptist Networks and a past Trustee of OMF International UK.

prof.p.fleming@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000.0003.1618.5241>

'I hope it leaves you with more questions than answers. I hope it challenges and even offends you. I hope it provokes you to further study' (p. 11). Thus concludes Andy McCullough's introduction to *Global Humility*. He draws on wide experience of cross-cultural church planting in Turkey, the UK (multicultural London), and India to explore the role of, and need for, global humility in our attitudes towards mission.

This book challenges Christians in the westernised 'global north' to reconsider the assumption that their beliefs, attitudes, and practices constitute the default foundations for global mission. McCullough repeatedly highlights the need for approaches to mission which ensure equity for voices from the majority world both globally and locally. He calls for global humility to inform cross-cultural mission, particularly where westernised attitudes and practices in mission do not resonate with local culture.

Global humility is, as the term implies, a widely distributed concept and this book considers its implications in a range of helpful iterations. The book's twenty-three chapters are located in six sections, focusing on humility that is moral, public, semantic, intercultural, incarnational, and theological. Chapters are relatively short, but without

loss of necessary detail; the text is appropriately referenced throughout. In addition, the frequent use of anecdotal material illustrates and enriches the call to global humility in mission leadership and participation. A majority of the illustrations are drawn from eastern Mediterranean contexts, but this is not exclusive and does not prevent the reader from applying the point made to other, more familiar, settings.

A strength of this book is the writing style, making it accessible to a range of readers and audiences. The overall volume, with its eclectic range of mission-related topics, is useful for informing/reminding and challenging all those involved in cross-cultural mission whether organisationally, vocationally, or as an element of personal life and witness. It is useful in a wide range of situations where there is the intention to rethink and refresh approaches to cross-cultural mission planning and delivery. It can also generate thought and discussion in theological education and training settings, individual chapters being well suited to flipped classroom scenarios. The whole book and individual chapters could also be useful for generating discussion within church mission groups and home/small groups.

Overall, as someone who has been involved in the practice and governance of cross-cultural mission practice for many years, this book has provoked for me a range of new and ‘reminder’ insights into the necessity for nuanced and culturally appropriate approaches to church planting and personal witness which ensure that all voices are heard.

Rosalind Tan, Nativity Petallar, and Lucy Hefford (eds), *God’s Heart for Children* (Langham Global Library, 2022), 283 pages. ISBN: 9781839732751.

Reviewed by Dorothy J. McMillan

Dr Dorothy J. McMillan is Book Reviews Editor, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, and a former senior lecturer in Early Childhood Education.
dorothy@ibts.eu

How are children seen and treated within our church communities? Can children in fragile contexts be given hope and become agents of hope? Do our churches regard children as members of the ‘priesthood of all believers’? What is the cost for children to be disciples of Jesus Christ?

These and many other questions — both for personal reflection and group discussion — challenge the reader throughout this book. In addition, there is a valuable online resource designed as a guide for Bible study discussion groups:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScLENLsTLKvju3nZFUoxu1Kk_63WIP3-yjLJ4FsEh4M-IABhA/viewform

As a sequel to *Understanding God's Heart for Children* (2007), which emerged from Viva Network's 2005 Cutting Edge Conference, this book aims to move beyond Western voices to include African, Asian, and Latino perspectives on practical theologies of children (25 authors in all). There are eight chapters, each divided into three sections: A Global Critical Issue; A Biblical/Theological Response; and a Case Study, followed by related discussion questions.

The eight topics are presented in a logical sequence: Created in Dignity; Placed in Families; Cared for in Community; Advocating for Children; Secured in Hope; Affirmed in God's Church; Included in God's Mission; Creation Care. Underlying each contribution is the dual principle that 'children are human beings, not human becomings' (p. xvii) and that they are precious to God.

Two key features of this book challenge me as a Western reader and merit brief mention here. First, the emphasis on children within families. The African concept of *ubuntu* (community) correlates with Bronfenbrenner's theory that children thrive within ecological systems — specifically here the 'microsystem', which includes home, school, church, and immediate neighbourhood. The protection of children within church families/communities is essential and, where biological families fail, the responsibility is placed on the church community to provide 'a safe space and a welcoming heart to all children' (p. 83), based on the biblical kinsman-redeemer model, rather than any expectation that state services will be available or even desirable.

The second feature that I find challenging concerns the suffering of children as disciples of Jesus. A Western approach might be to teach our children that they may receive ridicule or bullying as a result of their Christian faith, but we as adults will try to shelter them from this. The message of this book is that children should be taught to

develop their spirituality by maintaining hope through suffering. One Congolese writer states, 'The church in hostile environments needs Sunday School curricula which incorporate teaching on persecution and Christ-like responses' (p. 201). Throughout the book vivid case studies from countries such as Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan, and Myanmar reinforce this message.

I found this book engaging and, at times, uncomfortable. I commend it as an excellent resource for all concerned with the role of children in the church community.

Pieter J. Lalleman, Peter J. Morden, and Anthony R. Cross (eds) *Grounded in Grace: Essays to Honour Ian M. Randall* (Wipf & Stock, 2020), 316 pages. ISBN: 9781725288225.

Reviewed by Brian Talbot

Revd Dr Brian R. Talbot is minister of Broughty Ferry Baptist Church, Dundee, and a Senior Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam
briantalbot2008@gmail.com

This substantial volume of essays was published to honour one of our most distinguished European Baptist historians, Ian Randall. The studies included represent the diversity of his academic career, with contributors associated with him at Spurgeon's College, London, and at the IBTS in Prague, together with a number of former PhD students, as well a few other colleagues associated with Ian from other contexts where he has served over the years. The range of these excellent contributions covers theological reflection, missiology, and spirituality, as well as various historical topics.

Connected with Ian's British Baptist setting there are chapters on 'Election and Predestination in Seventeenth Century Baptist Confessions' by Nigel Wright; 'John Bunyan: A Seventeenth Century Evangelical?' by Peter Morden; 'Abraham Booth's Defence of Believers' Baptism by Immersion' by Sharon James; 'Dynamics versus Mechanics: Baptists and the Welsh and Lowestoft Revivals' by Timothy Welch and 'Mainstream: 'far greater ambitions' – An Evaluation of Mainstream's Contribution to the Renewal of Denominational Life, 1979–1994' by

Derek Tidball. There are also a couple of chapters on wider British Evangelical church life with ‘Undenominationalism in Britain, 1840–1914’ by Tim Grass and ‘Sarah Terrett, Katherine Robinson and Edith Pearce: Three Nonconformist Women and Public Life in Bristol, 1870–1910’ by Linda Wilson.

Representing Ian’s connection with wider Baptist life, the chapters include: ‘Are we all Hussites now?’ by Michael Bochenski; ‘Baptists in the Czech Lands’ by Lydie Kucova; ‘Adam Podin: An Estonian Baptist with International Links and Pan-Evangelical Vision’ by Toivo Pilli; ‘Jews in the Mindset of German Evangelicals’ by Erich Geldbach; ‘A Moment of Transformation: The European Baptist Federation and the Collapse of the Soviet Union and its European and Central Asian Empire, 1989–92’ by Keith Jones; together with ‘Baptists from East and West at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910’ by Brian Stanley.

The smaller number of studies in other fields are: ‘What is truth?: Evangelicalism, Foundationalism and a Hermeneutic of Witness’ by John Colwell; ‘Hearing what is Written to Recover our Future’ by Simon Jones; ‘Bringing Good News to the Poor: An Evangelical Imperative’ by Andrew Kirk; ‘Struggling with Female Happiness: God’s Will and God’s Blessing in Primary Evangelical Theology’ by Lina Andronoviene, and ‘*Sapientia Experimentalis*: “Knowledge by experience” – Aspects of a British Baptist Spirituality’ by Anthony Cross.

The above rich and diverse range of topics is a feast to enjoy and reflect on and is a fitting tribute to Ian. His own substantial number of publications is selectively listed in this volume alongside a biographical sketch of his life. The editors are also very careful to note their delight in Ian’s continuing production of further studies for future publication. It is impossible in a brief review to go into any significant detail on these chapters, but this book is warmly commended. It is also good news that it has been republished so that a wider audience can profit from it.

Gabrielle Thomas, *For the Good of the Church: Unity, Theology and Women* (SCM, 2021), 234 pages. ISBN: 9780334060604.

Reviewed by Fran Porter

Dr Fran Porter is Chair of Academic Oversight Committee and Senior Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam.

fporter@ibts.eu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3433-3116>

The very premise of this book is subversive. In the field of ecumenism, where women themselves are often viewed as a hindrance to ecumenical relations ('because of their desire to pursue all kinds of vocations', p. 32), in this book Gabrielle Thomas instead focuses on the problems women face *as women* in their different settings. It does this within a framework of receptive ecumenism, which asks what we need to learn from another Christian tradition to help us address some of the difficulties in our own. The intended appeal of the book, therefore, is both for anyone interested in reflecting on how to engage ecclesial differences, and for those concerned with women's experiences in churches.

The book is divided into two parts, and, in the Introduction, readers are invited to start with the section that interests them most. Part 1 introduces receptive ecumenism, tracing its development alongside other forms of ecumenical engagement, and then outlines the research on which the book is based. It is helpful here to note that the study emerges in the context of England, UK, and involves women from diverse traditions: Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Orthodox, Assemblies of God, Independent Evangelical, and Independent Pentecostal churches (p. 43). Next, the 'gifts' and 'wounds' of the various traditions with respect to women's work in churches identified in the research, are presented in the words of the participants, along with four main themes that emerged: hospitality, vocation, leadership, and power.

These four themes, presented as gifts, form the chapters of Part 2, each as a case study, variously drawing on the women's witness of churches, and engaging with a range of theological interlocutors, thereby extending 'the conceptual and constructive work on receptive ecumenism' (p. 193). Hospitality is explored against the backdrop of the

identified wound of Catholic teaching on the ‘genius of women’. At the invitation from Orthodox Christians exploring the implications of ordaining women, Gabrielle Thomas reflects on her own understanding of vocation as an Anglican priest. In response to testimony of a lack of ordained women’s flourishing in the Anglican Church, the case study on leadership focuses on the ‘Five Guiding Principles’. The wounds of Baptist women are foregrounded in the discussion on power, with insight sought from what is offered by Methodism’s quadrilateral and Connexion.

For anyone wanting to explore receptive ecumenism, the book is helpful, being realistic about the challenges, and also providing (in an appendix) suggestions on how to conduct such encounters (on any chosen topic). For daring to centre women when so much visible ecumenical work is male dominated, the book is most welcome. It does, however, contain disturbing and yet familiar evidence of women’s struggles for acceptance of their full (rather than a diminished, patriarchally defined) human personhood. The book, therefore, stands both as corroboration of, and as challenge to, how the wellbeing and contribution of women continues, all too often, to be excluded from claims about what is ‘for the good of the church’.

Ted Grimsrud, *To Follow The Lamb: A Peaceable Reading of the Book of Revelation* (Cascade Books, 2022), 278 pages. ISBN: 9781666732245.

Reviewed by David McMillan

Dr David J. McMillan is a Research Fellow at IBTS Amsterdam.

mcmillan@ibts.eu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1303-0175>

One of the great strengths of this book is that it clearly demonstrates that the prejudices we bring to the biblical text hugely influence what we see in the text. Grimsrud is transparent in regard to the hermeneutical lens he brings to the reading of Revelation. At the outset he names the tension that he needed to resolve, namely between his strong conviction that ‘Jesus would have us be pacifists’ on the one hand and, on the other, his conviction that the Bible, coming from God, must support pacifism. Working that out with Revelation was his challenge.

In his introduction he clearly acknowledges his lack of interest in ‘the technical aspects of critical study of the Bible’ (p. 5) and he states that ‘what one finds in Revelation will be decisively shaped by one’s assumptions’ (p.8). He returns to this theme later, saying, ‘the book must be studied for what it actually says but what we see will be shaped by what we expect to see’ (p. 16). I find in these and similar statements the main problem with Grimsrud’s contribution. Grimsrud is open to only one possible reading and offers a way to read Revelation if you happen to be a pacifist, but if you do not start with that perspective you are, in my opinion, unlikely to be convinced.

While it is clearly not possible to read any text, let alone Revelation, without some preconceptions, a more open enquiry and critical appraisal of the text is not impossible — indeed that is the very purpose and approach of other seminal works on Revelation on which he draws. People, academics or not, can approach Revelation in order to try to make sense of the text and may even find their expectations, if not their convictions, confounded as a result.

While frustrated by the restricted hermeneutical lens and his determination to find affirmation of his convictions at every turn, I am glad to have encountered the text and would encourage engagement with this book.

En route to engaging with the text of Revelation, Grimsrud offers some very useful and accessible summaries of ways in which Revelation is, and has been, interpreted. There are very useful sections at the end of each chapter raising questions for reflection and engagement. Grimsrud is consistent in seeking to relate the text to the contemporary world and its challenges. His focus on a critique of empires and their ‘warism’ serves as a challenge to those who use the text to indulge in glorifying the possibility of divinely sanctioned apocalyptic violence.

Grimsrud’s accessible style includes referencing contemporary culture — from Philip Hallie to Harry Potter — and opens his work to a wide audience. In a key section of the book, ‘How To Read Revelation’ (pp. 162ff.), he reflects on some of the most violent images in Revelation and provides food for thought. I appreciated his relentless focus on how

Revelation relates to the Jesus of the gospels and agree wholeheartedly with him that ‘if we keep Jesus at the center, we will learn how to read Revelation’ (p. 167). That still leaves open the possibility that we may read it differently.

Arend Van Dorp, *Ethnic Diversity and Reconciliation: A Missional Model for the Church in Myanmar* (Langham, 2022), 110 pages. ISBN:9781839736506.

Reviewed by Yuriy Skurydin

Yuriy Skurydin serves as Rector of Almaty Bible Institute (Kazakhstan) and is head of the education department in the Baptist Union of Kazakhstan. He is a PhD student at IBTS Amsterdam.

yuriy.skurydin@abi.asia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1529-895X>

This book addresses the complex interethnic and intercultural relations of Myanmar, both in society as a whole and in the church. This complexity arose from dramatic historical events that divided the inhabitants of Myanmar along linguistic, ethnic, and religious lines. Christianity, which appeared here more than 300 years ago, became the religion of more than three million people, but not among the titular population of Burmese, who zealously adhere to affiliation with Buddhism. Christianity is professed by small ethnic groups that experience mutual hostility with the titular nation. Van Dorp describes the current situation in Myanmar and tries to find a good missionary strategy for churches to gradually overcome both internal divisions in the church and attitudes towards other ethnic groups, especially the Burmese.

The author aims to explore the understanding of the church as an inclusive, multi-ethnic fellowship that models both diversity and unity. As he sees it, this will require reconciliation between the various ethnic groups within the Myanmar church. When I started reading the book, this goal seemed too romantic, but towards the end, Van Dorp convinced me that this task, although difficult, can be accomplished.

In the first part the author describes without embellishment the complex history of Myanmar and the current problems of Christian churches. The second part presents a theological understanding of the

problem through the study of works of theologians and missiologists, as well as relevant biblical texts. In the third part, Van Dorp addresses the practical task, describing the ministry of the church in Myanmar from a biblical-theological perspective, building a difficult but feasible strategy. Throughout, the author demonstrates deep theological understanding, even in such a short volume.

Interethnic conflicts between Burmese and other ethnic groups create almost impossible conditions for interethnic dialogue. Having an advantage and power, the titular nation, with the help of the army, promotes its understanding of a unitary society among ethnic groups (non-Burmese) who are trying to preserve their cultural heritage, language, and control over the territory. All this is complicated by the fact that Burmese consider themselves victims of the colonial policy carried out by Great Britain, whose government supported non-Burmese during its rule. ‘The Bamar therefore tend to downplay the suffering of the minorities, seeing themselves as equally victimized by the atrocities of the regime’ (p. 17).

Christian churches, unfortunately, are not standing aside. Thanks to Western influences, Christianity has spread among groups opposed to the main population and thus has come to be perceived as a colonial religion (pp. 61–62). Van Dorp sees a way out when churches overcome their internal divisions and begin to move beyond their traditional barriers, becoming a spiritual home for all ethnic groups in Myanmar. For such a deep transformation of the church, it is necessary to understand reconciliation with God and one’s neighbour on a personal and collective level (forgiveness must be practised even in the absence of repentance). Forgiveness must become an integral part of discipleship. By moving towards contextualising its ministry, the church becomes inclusive and welcoming to all people. Such a difficult path will make the missionary church of Myanmar successful, not only within the country but also in neighbouring Buddhist countries of the region.